



NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN TOWNS OF CASHIERS,
CHEROKEE, DILLSBORO AND SYLVA

To: Full TDA Board

From: Nick Breedlove, TDA Director 

Date: November 2, 2018

Subject: Updates for TDA Board Meeting

Visitor Survey

The majority of my efforts over the last month have been working on the Visitor Profile Survey with Young Strategies Inc. This process has been lengthy and involved to ensure we tailor the survey to our destination, residents, part-time residents and visitors. We finalized the survey this week and are preparing deployment next week. The survey should take about ten minutes for the respondent to complete. A copy of the final survey is available **here**. While there are a lot of questions, a respondent will not see all of them. The survey uses skip logic, so a subset of questions will be shown, dependent on whether one is a visitor, resident, part-time resident, or have not visited Jackson County before.

Several notes:

- RawleMurdy provided great feedback on what questions would yield the most valuable data to drive future marketing decisions.
- Several conference calls and a great deal of time on my time was devoted to tailoring the survey to our destination.
- Two ads will appear in local media (*Crossroads Chronicle* and *The Sylva Herald*) next week to bring awareness to the survey, so that residents and part-time residents may take part in the process. Many residents are seasonal and may be out of state this time of year, but receive the local newspaper in the mail. The ad will hopefully generate responses. In addition, I authored a press release with Pineapple and YSI to place in the newspapers, as that will go online and some people only read news online. Between those two efforts, we should cover the resident and part-time resident base.
- We plan to deploy to many social media outlets and I worked to establish a database and list of those outlets and partners to deploy to online.
- The survey will also be distributed through e-mail by some key tourism partners.

-A second survey, which will go out to those who manage lodging accommodations has been drafted and approved by Tom Garcia and Vick Patel, and that survey will go out on or about Nov. 30. That one-page survey will provide valuable insight from their perspective.

We expect good responses from all of these coordinated efforts. Berkeley Young from Young Strategies will attend our Nov. 7 meeting and offer additional updates at that time.

Employee Position

As the duties of my role have expanded and grown significantly beyond my initial job duties, I continually find myself challenged in having sufficient time to complete duties. There is more than adequate workload to be completed by an additional person. Investing in staff will allow us to expand our operations in service to growing tourism and driving occupancy and visits to Jackson County. In discussion with Executive Committee last month, we are looking at bringing on an additional position next fiscal year. Please see the brief related to this discussion **here**.

Grant Program Changes

Following several months of discussions, we are ready to present recommend changes to the grant program. Two committees have indicated unanimous support for the changes – the grant program review committee and the committee who reviews the actual applications. They will present and ask for adoption of these changes Nov. 7. A detailed summary of the proposed changes is **here**.

Networking

Citizens Academy

I presented to the second annual Citizen's Academy held on September 25 and the presentation on Tourism was well received. The program continues to be an excellent opportunity to educate our county's citizens on the work we do that benefits the county at large. I applaud the County Commissioners and Manager who implemented this program.

TTRA Marketing Outlook Forum

It was an honor to be asked to speak at the Emerging Leaders luncheon to a group of rising tourism professionals. Last year they presented me with the national award. I made many new connections in the industry at this conference, many of which could be valuable for our future endeavors in both marketing and research. While these conferences do involve a great deal of time investment and fiscal resources, they continue to drive our marketing efforts by providing the latest trends, insights, and tools to stay competitive and up-to-date on the tourism industry.

Student networking

I hosted a Western Carolina University student on October 9 for half a day to share what my role entails and to give them a better view of tourism in Jackson County. I also spent time working with an Eastern Carolina University student on a project related to sustainable tourism and shared many of the programs and efforts we have in place here.

Additional networking:

- Represented the JCTDA at the VisitNC Marketing Updates hosted at Lake Junaluska
- Represented the JCTDA at the inaugural WCU Outdoor Conference
- Represented the JCTDA at the Mountains-to-Sea Trail completion in Cherokee
- Held a roundtable with neighboring county DMO leaders to discuss regionalism

Future networking/meetings:

- Destinations International Fall Learning CDME Week, Seattle, Wash. Nov. 12 - 16
- Rawle Murdy Strategy meeting FY 19-20, Charleston, S.C., Dec. 12-14

Upcoming Exec. Director Vacation Dates:

- Nov. 21 (TDA office closed Nov. 22 & 23 for Thanksgiving), Dec. 17

VisitNC Conference:

I submitted my registration for the state tourism conference next year held in Wilmington from March 31 – April 2.

Board reappointments

We have respectfully requested that Jackson County Commissioners reappointment Tom Garcia and Ann Self to another three-year term. They are expected to vote on those nominations on Nov. 19. We have also asked Ann Self be appointed board chair. Mrs. Self would be a tremendous asset to the board in that role and has graciously agreed to serve if appointed.

I have scheduled a transition session with our outgoing chair, incoming chair designee, and former chair to allow for good dialogue about the role.

Executive Director Evaluation

Members of the Executive Board will soon be asked to complete my annual evaluation form by the Chairman. Those responses will go directly to the chair who will compile feedback and then share with me. Thank you in advance for the opportunity to receive feedback on my role and how I can improve to be of better service to our organization.

Water quality concerns

I spent the better part of two days trying to investigate water quality concerns brought to me by fly fishing outfitters related to turbidity in the river. While a definitive cause has not been determined, I worked with NC Wildlife, The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, Duke Energy and local stakeholders to better understand the impact, cause, and share accurate information with all parties to prevent potentially

inaccurate information from being disseminated which may negatively impact our fishing season. It would appear all issues have resolved, and all parties were very responsive to both my and local fishing outfitter concerns.

Google DMO Program

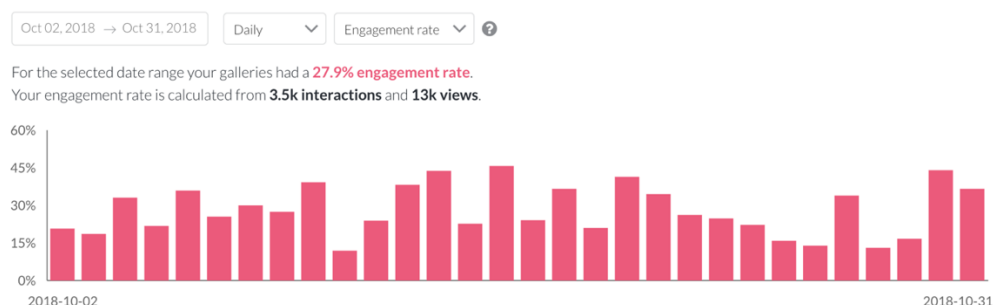
We continue to see great success with our partnership with Google on their new Google DMO program, which allows destinations greater involvement and participation on Google platforms. As of today, we have seen 758,255 views of 1,161 photos I have uploaded to Google of our destination. The higher quality content we share, the better our destination looks to potential travelers on Google. We have also had tremendous success in the Google Posts for Destinations program, and I will ask our social team who handles that to highlight them in their report to the board in person next week. That platform is a new one for us, much like social media, which allows us to share our message with potential travelers and capture leads.

Website updates

The website and its constant and continual improvement remain a top priority for both myself and our partners involved in work on that platform. There is not a day that goes by that we are not making enhancements for increased usability or adding new information or technology to the website.

I recently previewed the next version of our mobile interface and am very satisfied that visitors will find it easy to navigate and find the information they are seeking in a few clicks. I am also meeting with Rawle Murdy next month to plan for the next version of our website as we look toward the future. Our current website was launched two years ago, and we need to examine what the best platform for the future is so that when that time arrives, we are ready to migrate content and are prepared to take full advantage of the best technology to serve our content to visitors.

We continue to see terrific engagement from the new technology we implemented this year, Crowdriff, which aggregates social media content from visitors. Our galleries have a 27.9% engagement rate, meaning people click on them to see where the photo was taken or browse through the collections. It keeps people on our site longer and potentially converts them to a lead which then, in turn, may bring them to our destination.



Also website related, we debuted a new map page on our website under the 'Your Trip' tab. One of my key frustrations when searching online is not being able to find information in a central location. As a destination, we should make it easy for visitors to find every bit of information they seek at their fingertips, whether its digital or in a visitor center in printed format. We established the '**Maps**' page which contains digital versions of all of our area's maps. So far the page has been quite useful seeing a healthy number of sessions.

New attractions I've added to our website:

- Fire Mountain Trails, Cherokee
- 828 Escape Room, Sylva
- Lake Glenville Waterfall Cruises, Glenville

We've also created a new category on the website for Tours + Experiences as tourists are often looking for those. As businesses expand and locate to the area, I expect this category to fill out with additional experiences for our visitors.

Valley of the Lilies Race

I am working closely with the Valley of the Lilies Race coordinator this year in the hopes to make the race a destination race as opposed to a mostly local race. The event for 2019 will be April 6, 2019. The race organizer and I met to devise a way to encourage those runners to stay in town longer, patronize our restaurants and perhaps stay for the Sylva Brew Hop later that day with the potential that it becomes an overnight trip.

We've shared lodging, restaurant and visitor information that's now prominently displayed on the race website. We've also analyzed data from last year's race, and runners did come from 12 states. I think with our joint efforts, we have great potential working together. I'm also working with organizers of the Brew Hop to ensure we can handle additional capacity at the event and cross-market both events together.

2019 Event Dates

I've worked closely with event organizers throughout the county to compile a complete listing of all known 2019 and Q1 2020 events. With this information, I updated both our website and the state tourism website. I've shared this information with both Chambers of Commerce, so we aren't duplicating each other's efforts. Some of the event information needs additional information once available (event signup links, etc.) but for the most part, all is complete, excepting events that have not set dates yet. All information is now live on our website. If any board members need access to this master document for their own planning purposes I am happy to share.

Regionalism Approach to Marketing

Our marketing committee and I will meet before our full board meeting on Nov. 7 to discuss and approve a regional marketing approach to then share later in our regular meeting with the full board. We have worked with our partners (RM and Pineapple) and held discussions with neighboring DMO's, and we believe this program will be highly successful and beneficial to all.

CTE Programs

We've been invited by Jackson County Public Schools to engage with them in discussions about their Career and Technical Education programs as a follow up on our Pro-Start discussions related to workforce development. We will report back on this at a future meeting date.

New Content Capture

Earlier this year, I identified a local cinematographer and photographer, who, in working with Rawle Murdy, on projects has produced some excellent content for the JCTDA.

We have now produced our 60-second county vertical spot, our fly fishing spot, a new spot for Shadow of the Bear and some spots of driving through fall color on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

We also captured two great aerial photos which do a great job at showcasing our towns. One of the challenges we had earlier this year is not having a picture that's truly representative of the Cashiers area. Given the leaves were slow to change this year, we were able to capture a year-round look of Cashiers from above, that we can use in marketing and share with our partners for our mutual promotion of the area. Below, you'll see that image. Click these links to see our new video spots: **Fall on the Blue Ridge Parkway & Shadow of the Bear**. Previously we did not have owned footage of either, only third-party content.



Visitor Center improvements

I continue to work with both Visitor Centers to assess what is needed to improve and grow the visitor center experience while there. At our last full board meeting, we asked Jackson County Chamber Director Julie Spiro about whether we've tried snacks or free giveaways.

This month she purchased a popcorn machine and trialed it and got excellent feedback and people appreciated the snack. I would ask the board to reimburse the Visitor Center for that expense (~\$250) and also ask that we fund a water delivery service annually to both Visitor Centers. A relatively small expense ~\$350 a year per center, goes a long way to provide that extra comfort for those coming in. This year the funds can come out of the Visitor Center Improvements fund which there are funds available.

I have asked both Chamber Directors to keep us in mind as they see items that would improve the visitor experience and make those requests to us.

Request: Reimburse JC Visitor Center \$250 and fund water service at both Visitor Center annually.

Ale Trail

In anticipation for April's annual NC Beer Month where we print coasters for our breweries, this year, we're going to partner with the Jackson County Chamber to also print the backside of the coaster with their Hook Line and Drinker artwork at a minimal increased cost to cross-promote both events. Given we distribute these in April, it's an excellent opportunity to drive awareness of the May event.

Cashiers Attractions, Adventures and Waterfall Map

Having almost exhausted our initial printing of 15,000 Cashiers maps that we unveiled this year, we've done another print run of 30,000. I hear great feedback from all of our partners, hoteliers, and the Cashiers Area Chamber and Visitor Center that this map is very popular and a great addition to our tourism collateral.

Visitor Guide

As we've been increasing leads and interest in Jackson County this year, our Visitor Guides are in higher demand. We are now entirely out of the 30,000 untabbed Visitor Guides and only have tabbed versions, which we are opening tabs on before placing in our kiosks and racks. Next year we will likely need to increase the number printed. I am hopeful that we can make it through with current stock until our next printing. I would like to have the new Visitor Guide content sent to our designer by the third week in January, which would mean proofs back to us mid-February and hopefully in hand March 1.

Online Tax Payments

Our online tax payment system is now live so occupancy tax remitters may pay their taxes online. We are one of only a few destinations in the region that offer this convenient service, and we expect those who remit from out of state to find this streamlines the filing process.

High Hampton Renovations

As you may have seen in the news release I sent earlier this week, High Hampton will close to begin property renovations after their season this year and is expected to reopen in March of 2020. During the current fiscal year, I estimate that this will impact our budget by (\$15,000) and next fiscal likely between (\$175,000 and \$200,000). We will need to begin planning in December for how to respond to that impact along with increased needs (staff, marketing dollars, etc.) and expenditures in maintaining our current programs.

I will poll the board as to availability for a December work session before our regular meeting on Nov. 7.

Tourism Works campaign

I created a 'Tourism Works' campaign in the form of a simple, easy to read card that we can hand out to stakeholders (restaurants, shops, etc.) sharing the success of our programs and efforts. It breaks down spending by tourists and how that impacts the local economy. I will distribute these to board members at our next meeting. It is crucial that you as board members are continually advocating for what we do in our communities.

2019 Meeting Dates (proposed calendar)

I worked on assembling our 2019 meeting dates to a calendar to avoid conflicts with major holidays, conferences I'll be attending and other known conflicts. I would suggest we again avoid July and October as those are the busiest times for those in the lodging industry.

I am also recommending this year we set aside three dates during the first quarter as 'snow' dates for our meetings. We will go ahead and set them as meeting dates then cancel them if not needed. On the calendar invite you receive from me in January they will be labelled snow dates.

The proposed dates are on the following sheet.



**JACKSON COUNTY TOURISM
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

TENTATIVE 2019 Jackson County TDA Board of Directors Meeting Schedule

The following is the meeting schedule for the TDA Board of Directors and Executive Committee Meetings for the calendar year 2019. For additional information contact TDA Director Nick Breedlove, Director@DiscoverJacksonNC.com, 828-848-8711.

TDA Board of Director Meetings

Wednesday, January 16, 2019, 1:00 p.m. at Cordelia Camp Building Rm. 143, WCU, Cullowhee, NC 28723
Wednesday, February 20, 2019, 1:00 p.m. at Cordelia Camp Building Rm. 143, WCU, Cullowhee, NC 28723
Wednesday, March 13, 2019, 1:00 p.m. at Cordelia Camp Building Rm. 143, WCU, Cullowhee, NC 28723
Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 1:00 p.m. at Cordelia Camp Building Rm. 143, WCU, Cullowhee, NC 28723
Wednesday, May 22, 2019, 1:00 p.m. at Cordelia Camp Building Rm. 143, WCU, Cullowhee, NC 28723
Wednesday, June 19, 2019, 1:00 p.m. at Jackson County Library Conf. Room, 310 Keener St, Sylva, NC 28779
Wednesday, August 21, 2019, 1:00 p.m. at Cordelia Camp Building Rm. 143, WCU, Cullowhee, NC 28723
Wednesday, September 18, 2019, 1:00 p.m. at Cordelia Camp Building Rm. 143, WCU, Cullowhee, NC 28723
Wednesday, November 13, 2019, 1:00 p.m. at Cordelia Camp Building Rm. 143, WCU, Cullowhee, NC 28723
Wednesday, December 18, 2019, 1:00 p.m. at Cordelia Camp Building Rm. 143, WCU, Cullowhee, NC 28723

Inclement weather dates, will be canceled if unneeded.

All held at 1:00 p.m. at Cordelia Camp Building Rm. 143, WCU, Cullowhee, NC 28723
Inclement weather date for January board meeting - January 23, 2019
Inclement weather date for February board meeting - February 27, 2019
Inclement weather date for March board meeting - March 27, 2019

TDA Executive Committee Meetings

January 9, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
February 13, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
March 16, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
April 10, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
May 8, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
June 12, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
July 10, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
August 14, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
September 11, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
October 9, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
November 6, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779
December 11, 2019, 1 p.m. at JCTDA Office, 116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779